OtherHand

Water Carriers, 10/30/2010

After the N3 hike, the temperature door closed for the Summer and gave me a chance to think about things. It bothered me that the kids hadn't been found, and it seemed they should be somewhere close. The problem lay in getting into the area for long enough to do a decent search. After some thought, I maybe came up with a way.

The plan was to wait until the weather cooled, and then do a day hike in to stage water for a later. more ambitious trip. The idea was to car camp at the Anvil Canyon trailhead, then proceed in for a dayhike to Squaw Spring. At Squaw Spring fill up a number of jugs with water, then proceed up towards the plateau and cache the water for the future trip. At that time the water could be picked up and used during the search.

Studying topo maps, I had also found a new route up to the plateau that might be easier than the route Les and I had done, as it climbed a few hundred feet less. It was also not too far from Squaw Spring. It was a very narrow canyon that came off N1 at went to the plateau. This seemed to be a good spot for a water cache.

I set up the trip for October 30, 2010 as the weather was cooling. I had spent several months collecting 2 liter soda bottles and now had enough for a 10 gallon cache. I figured it would be enough water for four people for two nights up on the plateau. Pete Carlson was going to join me, as he had a good time on the N3 hike. He always scares me a bit, as he can hike me into the ground. And for at least a few miles, we would both be carrying about 40 pounds of water each.

The weather in the days before our planned trip was pretty dicey, but was clearing. We decided to go anyway, and we got rained on as we spent the night at the Anvil Canyon

trailhead while the wind howled. We started in anyway, looking behind us at the ominous clouds over Manly Peak. But by about 10 AM it had cleared and turned really nice.

Looking at the weird weather behind us as we start hiking in. Manly in the clouds. (T. Mahood)

In many ways this was the easiest trip in. I now had good GPS tracks with all the burro trails marked, making travel much better. And for the climb up to Squaw Spring and on into the N1 canyon, I had worked out a GPS path with the topo maps I called a minimum energy route. It was one that slowly climbed the contours and avoided the up and down climbs caused by all the ravines. No wasted effort. It was the sort of thing you can do with a GPS that's much harder with a paper map.

Approaching Squaw Spring, the most green for miles around (T. Mahood)

Reaching Squaw Spring, we headed toward where Les and I had got our water the year before. Uh, oh….no water, it was dry. That was a problem. So Pete and I spent a while looking around, and a few hundred feet down canyon, we found some small pools in the heavy brush, adequate for our needs. So we each set upon pumping with two pumps.

Ever pump 5 gallons with a stupid backpacking filtration pump? It's a pain in the ass, and takes a very long time. After an hour, I was beat, but we had finished. It was time to head out.

Putting on a pack that was now 40 pounds heavier was….disturbing. It brought my total pack weight to over 60 pounds. I needed both trekking poles to stabilize myself on the rough terrain. We headed southeast to N1, slowly climbing. Eventually we reached the side canyon that was going to take us up to the top. It was a small, nondescript thing on our left that we would have normally gone right pass but for the GPS. We turned up it.

It was narrow and climbed like crazy. But it was quite scenic. For some reason, I was having a terrible time keeping up with Pete, and was just getting exhausted. I could only climb a short ways and had to stop. I figured it was all the weight, but I had carried this sort of load before. The original idea was to put the water another mile and a half on to the plateau (all downhill), but I was in really bad shape. I was going to be lucky to make it to the top of the crest. Pete generously offered to take one of my five gallons, and that helped

a lot. In time, I topped out at the crest, pretty much toast.

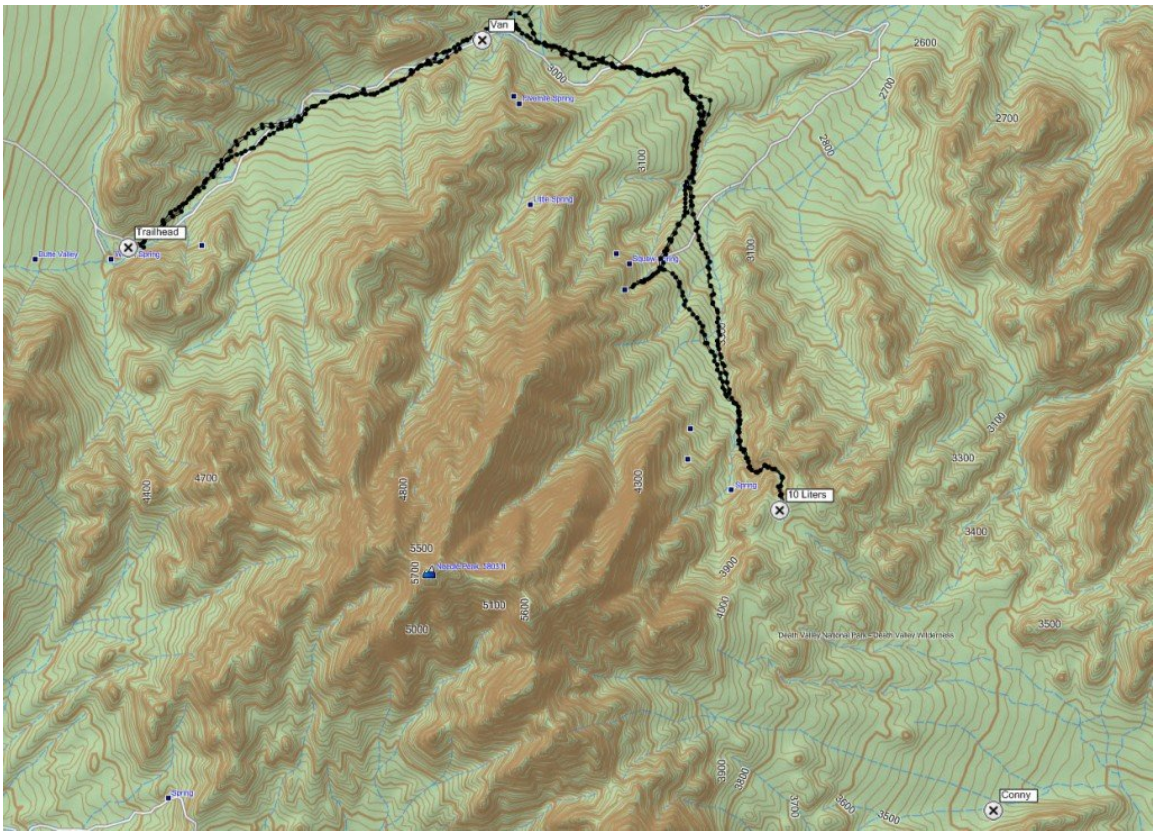
It was a very scenic spot, and we could see the small ravine running downhill towards the southeast that would eventually lead to the search area. But for now we had gone in as far as I could and needed to bury the water.

This turned out to be the sort of thing that when planning it all out at home, sounded like a fine idea. Having unloaded our packs, creating a large pile of water bottles, and looking around at the rocky terrain, we now started asking,how the hell were we going to bury all these suckers? We didn't want to just pile rock on them, as we were unsure exactly when we'd be back. Wandering around a bit, we found some areas of loose, windblown sand that looked diggable. So we set to it with our hand shovels. About an hour later, we had them reasonably covered.

Ummmm....Maybe we shoulda brought a backhoe? (T. Mahood)

Leaving our valuable buried treasure, we turned around and headed back. It was a long

slog and I didn't feel as good as I thought I would, having got rid of all the extra weight. By the time we reached the trailhead we had put in 14 miles for the day. Along the way, between the pack weight and the nasty volcanic terrain, I had torn up my boot soles to the point they needed resoling. This meant I'd have to hustle to do that before we headed back for the real search. This trip again underscored something to me....It's a very difficult area to get into.



Water cache hike GPS tracks (T. Mahood)

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